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UNCLAS GUATEMALA 002587

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: GERARDI WITNESS MURDERED

1. Press reported the murder on October 5 of Erick Urizar, a defense witness in the murder case of Bishop Juan Gerardi. Urizar was shot while exiting his gun shop in the capital with his brother. He had provided an alibi for ex-Capitan Byron Lima Oliva, convicted to 30 years imprisonment (since appealed) as the intellectual author of the Gerardi murder, which occurred April 26, 1998. Ivan Urizar, Erick's brother, was wounded in the attack and is in serious condition in hospital. There are no indications at this time that Urizar's murder was politically motivated.

2. Comment: Several prosecution witnesses and one of the three military agents convicted of the Gerardi murder have been murdered since the start of the Gerardi investigation. The murder of Urizar does not appear to be politically-motivated, and may be attributable to spiraling violent crime in the capital.
HAMILTON